

# WAYNE TOMORROW!COM

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**Wayne Tomorrow! A county-sponsored, community-based collaboration focused on projects, resources and infrastructure needed to move Wayne County, its people, its culture and its economy into a vibrant future.**



WT! Field Trip to Hamlin



Aging in Place Comes to Wayne



Partner Profile: Housing Dept.



Playground Work at Park Street

## Wayne Tomorrow! Action Committee Takes Field Trip to Visit Hamlin Area



The Wayne Tomorrow! Action Committee took a field trip in September to visit the Hamlin area and the Sterling Business & Technology Park.

The morning began at the Hamlin Area Community Library, where Library Director Lynn Scramuzza gave the members a tour of the lower level of the building, which the Board of Trustees plans to transform into a community room and co-working space.

A tenant that occupied a portion of the lower level has left, and the library plans a renovation project, which Scramuzza said will also include the purchase of modular furniture on the upper level as well. "If we can move the furniture around, we can do a lot of exciting things in terms of fundraising," Scramuzza said, mentioning indoor miniature golf or an escape room event.

The Hamlin Library has also been working with Wayne Tomorrow! to create a Community Hub, where residents can access a variety of services from education and entertainment to telemedicine and business support. Scramuzza has also been working with The Stourbridge Project to provide a co-working space to serve individuals now using the Honesdale space.

The Wayne Tomorrow! Community Hubs Task Force has submitted an application for an Appalachian Region Commission grant to support the development of a network of these community spaces, including a current effort in Newfoundland.

From the Library, the group traveled just a few miles south on Route

191/196 to the Sterling Business & Technology Park, where Wayne Economic Develop Corp. Executive Director Mary Beth Wood provided an overview of the development of the 23-lot park, which is Wayne County's only Keystone Opportunity Expansion Zone.

Wood explained the two businesses operating in the park have enjoyed the significant tax break it provides, but added after the initial designation expires, the property taxes to be collected by county and local government in 2024 is estimated at more than \$52,000 compared to the less than \$8,000 in taxes the property generated before the project.

WEDCO has been working to prepare sites and construct shell buildings to lure employers to occupy lots that have already received their final subdivision approvals from the Sterling Township. The next is construction of a 40,000 square foot prefabrication shell building on lot three, pending a \$1 million state-funded Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program grant.

Wood also discussed plans for a small walking trail to a picturesque stretch of the Wallenpaupack Creek where workers can have lunch or just relax.

Finally, the group visited the new Hamlin Fire & Rescue Station on Route 590. Chief Steve Price provided a tour of the state-of-the-art facilities that include multiple equipment bays, administrative offices and crew space.

While the building currently has a kitchen to serve fundraising events in the bays, the structure can be easily expanded for an event hall. Price said the project was many years in the making, and the company hopes to make it available for community use. The company dedicated the new station on Sept. 17.

## NeighborWorks NEPA Announces Aging in Place Program Expansion to Wayne



NeighborWorks NEPA and US Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) announced the award of a \$1 million grant from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) to expand Aging in Place services in Lackawanna and Wayne Counties.

Awarded as part of HUD's Older Adult Home Modification Program, the grant will fund safety upgrades and home improvement projects in 225 homes to meet the needs of low-income elderly homeowners in the two counties.

"Seniors across the nation have made their desire to live in their own homes resoundingly clear, which is why the work that NeighborWorks does is so vital," said Sen. Casey. "These dollars will go directly to seniors who need services and supports such as safety adjustments, home repairs and accessibility modifications that will allow them to live safely and with dignity."

During a press conference Sept. 27, Jesse Ergott, Neighborworks NEPA President & CEO, thanked the local foundations and philanthropic supporters who helped the agency build the capacity to focus on Aging in Place needs among seniors. The program served 400 Lackawanna County residents in four years.

Ergott said the \$1 million in HUD funding "will allow us to double down on our efforts in Lackawanna County and expand into Wayne County. Overall, the grant is expected to serve at least 200 additional seniors, and more if the funding can leverage additional resources.

Wayne County Area on Agency on Aging Director Mary Ursich said the program will help seniors who need ramps to access services and bathroom modifications to help with bathing. The program will also provide jobs for local contractors.

Yolanda Brown, Lead & Healthy Homes Program Division Director at HUD, said, "[The program] provides funding to assess the needs of low-income, elderly homeowners and make home modifications that are responsive to their needs." She said the work made possible by these funds help to make activities of daily living, like eating, cooking and moving around the home, easier and extend the opportunity to safely age in place.

Sen. Casey said, "I look forward to seeing the benefits that will reach Northeastern Pennsylvania seniors as a result of this grant, and I will continue to advocate for a historic federal investment in home and community-based services."

"We are most thankful for the support of Senator Casey and the US Department of Housing & Urban Development in supporting our Aging in Place program with this significant investment," Ergott said of the award. "Being able to reach more older adults in Lackawanna County, together with the expansion of Aging in Place services in Wayne County, will make a profound impact for the good of older adults in Northeastern Pennsylvania."

Since its inception in 2015, the Aging in Place program of NeighborWorks NEPA has provided homeowners aged 60 and older with services that focus on assisting them to continue living safely and with dignity in their home and community. Services provided as part of the Aging in Place program include critical safety modifications, home repairs, senior isolation prevention, financial coaching and more.

Wayne County residents seeking Aging in Place services can call the Wayne County Area Agency on Aging at 570-253-4262.



## County Housing Department Targets Homeless Prevention, Rental Assistance



Every month, Housing Assistance ranks among the top information and referral requests in Wayne County made to the 211 service operated by the United Way. The need dates back long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Back in 2015, the Wayne County Human Services Agency created a Housing Department to specifically identify and assist individuals and families experiencing or on the verge of homelessness. Today, current Housing Director Heather Miszler supervises two full-time caseworkers, who are assigned to families for the duration of contact with the office.

The Housing Department administers a number of grants that help income-eligible consumers with a place to stay in both the short and medium term, with the ultimate goal in each case a long-term stable housing solution.

Frontline workers in Behavioral Health, Aging, Children & Youth Services and the Drug & Alcohol Commission make referrals to the department, but also help the Housing Caseworkers address the underlying causes of homelessness.

Miszler said Caseworkers Stacey Mizwinski and Ellie Ennis make referrals to these and other community-based organizations and agencies who can help. "The more resources, the better," she explained.

Prior to the pandemic, Miszler said the department administered funding streams through the Continuum of Care and the Emergency Solutions Grants, funded by the Rapid Rehousing Program, which, combined, provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for assistance with security deposits and rentals payments to help people get back on their feet. Now, the Housing Department can offer emergency shelter, assistance with preventing homelessness in addition to the Rapid Rehousing Program.

Since COVID-19 and its financial impact on so many lives, Miszler said the department has seen an influx in both the number of people experiencing a housing crisis and the financial resources to combat it.

Chiefly, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which helps those affected by the pandemic catch up on rental and utility payments, has provided \$4 million, and the county may be eligible for up to \$2 million more.

According to Miszler keeping renters in their homes with the lifting of the Eviction Moratorium is particularly crucial in Wayne County because of a significant lack of housing inventory. "There's so few places for our consumers to go."

Tackling the larger issue of housing availability falls to the Wayne Tomorrow! Housing Task Force. The Task Force, chaired by Lori O'Malley, is working with United Neighborhood Centers, local municipalities, Miszler's department and housing industry representatives to define ways of improving the quantity and quality of the housing stock in Wayne County.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has funneled a lot of funding into the county to help renters – there is even some available for homeowners, it has also created a huge demand for real estate in the area.

The inventory crunch, while not new, has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Miszler said often when rental properties are sold, the new owners want to live there, decreasing the rental inventory in the county even further.

Limits on the amount of subsidies -- \$718/month including utilities for a one-bedroom apartment, can also discourage some landlords from participating in the programs. The US Department of Housing & Urban Development sets those Market Rates for rental payments as well as the Area Median Income that plays a role in consumer eligibility.

Preventing homelessness and helping those who are homeless get back into a stable situation can be challenging work, but Miszler said the outcomes can be very rewarding. She said one man who came to them with nowhere to turn told them they changed his life with an emergency hotel stay then a few months at the county's small shelter facility and finally an apartment of his own.

Since July 2020, the Housing Department helped 300 families. Miszler urges anyone who is experience a housing emergency or needs assistance staying their home should reach out to the Wayne County Housing Office at 570-253-6758. All services are completely confidential.



## System of Care Spruces Up Basketball Courts & More at Park Street Complex



The Wayne County System of Care fixed up the basketball court at the county's Park Street Complex in Honesdale, with the help of a grant from the United Way of Lackawanna and Wayne Counties.

SOC Coordinator Dave Hartung said the group, which is focused on improving the child-serving systems in Wayne County, painted the basketball courts, installed new nets, with plans for new signage and a bench and table as well as updating the trash receptacles.

The work represents the first phase in a long-term project to renovate and increase the accessibility of the park for people of all ages and abilities. Eventually, Hartung said SOC partners hope to install all-abilities playground equipment in the park, renovate the Bocce Ball

Court and are even working on art for the pedestrian tunnel that leads to Park Street.

He said they have established a pass through fund at the Wayne County Community Foundation to facilitate donations to the project and have applied for a grant through the foundation.

In the Wayne County System of Care, youth, family and system leaders work together as equal and trusted partners to create sustainable change to empower those involved in youth-serving systems to be responsible and accountable for positive outcomes.

For more information on SOC or the project, call Dave Hartung at 570-493-0915.

## Wayne Economic Development Corporation Annual Dinner



WEDCO hosted Stephanie Raymond, the first female president of PPL Electric Utilities Corporation, as speaker for the Annual Dinner at Bryn Mawr Conference Center Outdoor Pavilion Sept. 21. She talked about having the courage to be bold and innovative.



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